

ITEM NO. 4  
BILL 52 (2017)  
CITY CLERK  
C & C OF HONOLULU  
2017 JUN 26 AM 10:02

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**Regarding Historic Homes in the State of Hawaii,  
Agenda Item CB 52 ( 2017)**

I am responding to the upcoming Council PH Committee Public Hearing scheduled for 6-28-2017 regarding Historic Homes and Properties in Hawaii.

I urge you to vote NO to this amendment to raise the taxes on Historic Homes.

I am representing myself, as an owner of an historic home in the Valley of Manoa on the island of Oahu.

We already have obligations of expense in owning these homes. We have to permit access to our homes on the second Saturday of every month. We have to maintain them in pristine condition. We cannot use materials except as are appropriate to the time period. And we cannot alter anything without going through an onerous process. We do all this because we are all devoted to protecting the History of Hawaii.

I purchased my home 25 years ago, and it was in terrible condition. This amazing home had been left to neglect and disrepair by the previous owners, who did not know the historic significance of the house, nor the architectural significance of the home, nor even the architects who designed it.

Upon viewing the house for the first time, I immediately recognized the "Back Bay Boston, Craftsman Bungalow" look of the buildings with a singular Tahitian Roofline. What a find. However, upon close of escrow I began to realize how much work I had assumed in order to bring this gem back to its original glory.

It took me a month to remove the beer bottles from the Mock Oranges, (as the house was rented to boys from the U of H Manoa)

28 layers of paint dripped from the cedar shingles, the roof needed to be replaced and every piece of wood within the structures had been painted so many times that the only solution was taking all the paint off of everything. I refinished the flooring, I structurally supported the foundations, and began the interior work. It took me 7 years of hard labor to bring this house back to beautiful. Now it is a showpiece and a home I share with my island neighbors. I decorated the interiors in the style of the Iolani Palace, and made this house an example of how Hawaiians actually lived at the turn of the century. From 19<sup>th</sup> century silver, and furniture to paintings, from 19<sup>th</sup> Century porcelains to Chandeliers, this house is a testament to the way our Civilized Nation lived in the time of the kings and Queens of Hawaii.

MISC. COM. 3332

In order to maintain this house, it takes an extraordinary amount of work. Keeping the lava rock walls surrounding the property is a task in and of itself, but every so often, I have to remove a portion of the roof and all the structural elements underneath to re-support the flow of the roofline. (We live in the tropics and the fierce attack of termites is a constant) I cannot use plastic for fencing, nor any plastic repairs, as everything must be done in accordance with the elements originally used when the houses were constructed.

I don't mind doing this, as this house is a visual lesson about the validity of the Hawaiian People's cultural civilization, and their standing on the world theater as a nation of equal standing. The Hawaiian people need reminders of this, as they are continually bombarded with cute bamboo climbing acts at the Polynesian Cultural Center, and charming woven reed hats, along with died raffia Hula skirts. Hawaii is a far deeper culture than that, and if we let the history of the islands slip out from our fingers, there will be nothing left to teach the young folks growing up. Our Hawaiian renaissance is dependent upon the entire legacy of Hawaii.

If you increase the TAXs on historic homes you make it even more difficult for us to convince people to preserve their extraordinary houses. This is the only incentive we have to convince people to save their houses for others and our posterity. I have gone door to door in Manoa to ask people to put their homes on the registry. But frankly it is an onerous process. One has to do the research, hire a specialist to research the provenance of the house, find all the deeds, even going back to the Grand Mahele of 1844. A chain of title and disposition is required as well as a full set of blueprints, and plans if they still exist. There are three different buildings in Honolulu alone where records are kept, so this is no small undertaking to find the origins of a home and the original families that occupied them. A new Survey is required. However, when you do have all of that information you have a story of the history of interwoven connections between families, family trees, clans and the evolution of familial ties which come down to us from History.

One of the big problems in preserving these Historic Homes, is that the requirement is not to alter the structures, and if you want to put an "add on" or something you have to get permission from the Historic Preservation Department as well as the Building and Planning Department. I am going through that process just to build a lava rock wall. So instead of taking one month as is normal, this process will take me three months minimum. This shows a little of the time and effort and determination it takes to own an historic home.

Most folks in Manoa simply do not want to restrict any of their rights, so it is very difficult to get them to sign up. Without a really good incentive these homes most likely will be demolished for newer, Mc Mansions and Condos. Do you really want the valleys of Manoa and Nuuanu to look like Los Angeles?

Without preservation, the inevitable erosion of our history will take place. Look at Kakaako now. Who would have believed in 1977 we would ever have luxury housing high rises in a light industrial cottage industry zone. Yet the need for housing is so great in Hawaii, that we have bulldozed acres of history to make way for "new and better" housing. At one point, we need to make a decision as to whether history has any worth.

I would like to leave you with an example of worth. I am sure all of you have gone to Europe. You are all excited and look forward to getting off the plane, but cannot wait to get out of the modern streamlined airport. You are heading at breakneck speed to the "real" Europe. You want the small cafes along the Amalfi Coast, or the old castles along the Rhine, or the centuries old vineyard Houses where you can buy the local vintage. You do not go to Europe for anything new. You go to Europe to discover its history.

Similarly people flock to Hawaii not for the high rises on the beach, nor the crowded stores along Kalakaua and Kuhio, nor even Ward Center or Pearlridge shopping center.. They come here for the history of the islands. They go to the Queen Emma Summer Palace, the Iolani Palace, Pearl Harbor Memorial, the bunkers on the mountains of Makapuu and Diamondhead. They come for pristine beaches, gorgeous Tropical rainforests, hiking trails up the mountains, vistas of meadows against the backdrop of the Waianae Mountains. At what point do we say, let's preserve these things? If we allow the destruction of the elements of the islands which are the "draw" for 80 percent of our economy then we all lose. Historic homes are part of the draw for tourists. But more importantly they are a draw for the people of Hawaii. Without a visual foundation of their own history, we subjugate the people of Hawaii once more. People need to be grounded in their own culture. They need a visual reference point to find pride in themselves and their accomplishments. This means more than preserving three "palaces" this means keeping the record of their significance alive. Hawaii was the first completely literate nation on earth. Preserve the record of these extraordinary people.

On a pragmatic note, without this tax incentive, our plan to create an historic district in College Hill is dead. Without a carrot this donkey will not budge.

Do not take away the only tool we have to lure people into preserving their homes.

And just for the record, since we are talking about less than 400 homes in the entire state of Hawaii, the minimal increase monetarily you would receive is equal to one lunch for your department executives to have over another budget issue. It is totally ridiculous to scrap a program of such value to have one more lunch catered for one more "talk story" session.

Sorry to insult, but sometimes we just need to prioritize decision making. This whole issue reminds me of the Trump administration looking to remove National Parks. Will it save a buck? YES, will it diminish the country? Without doubt. I apply the same question here. How much is your legacy worth? Shall you "Trump this out" or vote with your hearts and the care of your posterity in mind?

Sincerely,

Robert E. Fox

6-26-2017

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**Regarding CB 52 ( 2017)**  
**Opposing the Bill**

2017 JUN 27 AM 10:15

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Dear Council Members

The balance of incentives for development versus incentives for preservation. Is there a true balance?

We are in an expanding population situation, with no visible erosion of the increase of people inhabiting the planet. Compassion demands that we build housing to accommodate the increased numbers of people, low income, median income and high income, and homeless. Although Hawaii has done an admirable job of permitting the development and condominium division of property by the loosening of some development restrictions, and some rezoning, we have not ended up with a percentage balanced inventory of housing. Due to this lack of future planning we have more internal housing density and more homelessness on the islands as the lack of affordable housing diminishes per population. Make no mistake building housing is an expensive venture, and developers will not go through with a project unless someone sweetens the pot in a state over run with regulations and hoops to jump through. Nationally, Hawaii is considered one of the least business friendly States in the Union.

Of course the old argument is that it doesn't "pay" to build affordable housing.

And yet almost every urban study shows that increases in density and homelessness are the most escalating costs to urban environments. The medical care needed, the emergency runs for power and sewer, the breach of lines due to overuse, and the crisis management that is definitive of low income and homeless populations is self-evident. The Costs of not building are steeper than building by pure continuum of care for those in crisis due to lack of housing.

So the solution is to reach a balanced plan that the state can direct, which will not break the bank, so to speak. Various solutions have been put forward, like micro units for student housing, Cooperative Living housing, Container Housing, Tiny Houses, Ohana units, etc. So at least we are thinking about solutions to our population problem.

However, the unaddressed issue of preservation hangs over the State like a shroud. It is pretty rare for any professor to argue that large populations living in tight quarters are more content than living in more communal situations. But more to the point, the emotional content of life is dependent, not only upon a family living together rather than apart, but for that family to have a deep connection with the culture they share. This cultural bonding moves through all levels and degrees of housing, from the homeless to the wealthy. Without a sense of place and a sense of belonging, something is lost within the human psyche. Living is not merely existence, although in extremes of depredation, existence sounds pretty wonderful. But living, fully living, is to embrace the world around oneself, and the culture one comes from and is proud of. As we develop new ways to house people, we should keep in mind the need for communal connection. How does this relate to preservation? In every society there is a deep genetic need to be part of the "clan". It is who we are. It is where we come from. It is how we became who we are. That



historical record of self-awareness empowers humans to feel esteem, not just for themselves but for their families, clans and communities. It is imperative to preserve "totems" or symbols of history and heritage in order to humans to feel grounded within themselves.

You see new apps online that will guide you through your family tree. These are extremely popular and make quite a profit, which affirms that the need for historical presence is a real human need

In our minute by second world, these reminders of connections, or lineage and of belonging make the weariness of modern life more bearable. In fact, I believe without those innate connections we suffer in more ways than one can describe. Obviously the alienation factor is well known, which produces anarchists and agitators. With nothing to lose, they would demolish all they see, praying and hoping for something to "come up from the ashes" which will fulfill their emptiness. Isolation is probably the number one cause of criminal behavior ( besides domestic violence) Being shut off from and cordoned away from ones cultural birthright has been used for centuries in the subjugation of peoples all over the world. We called that Colonization. So if we have open eyes and can see the logical connections in this discussion, then we must consider the immense importance of Cultural history in the well-being of, and the peaceful co-existence of humankind.

Here is Hawaii, a place that has suffered from the colonial mentality, this is extremely important. If we wish to have peace, if we wish to bring up people of character and meaning, of understanding and good will, then it is incumbent upon us to preserve their heritage. Vital cultural protections are demanded in order to safeguard and enhance society, especially in isolated geographical locations.

As we have incentivized development in Hawaii, we must incentive cultural preservation. Development leads to housing of the people, and yet as important, cultural heritage increases the sense of belonging, well-being and peaceful calm in the people.

We simply cannot approach this state as if it were merely a one sided coin. This is a dynamic and diverse community of peoples from all over the world, struggling to better their lives in a tiny bit of geography. If we do not want the keg to blow up, then the logical thing to do is to preserve those cultural things that lend a sense of belonging and place to the people.

This is the goal of historic Preservation in Hawaii. Knowing the human need for connection, we advocate for the preservation of homes, sites, architectural treasures and areas, which have emotional connections for the peoples of Hawaii. If we "pave over paradise" we will reap the results in isolation, disconnection, lack of belonging, and ultimately the out-picturing of that in behaviors which are not conducive to a peaceful integrated society. It is hard to imagine a young person growing up around elders and places of heritage, acting out in frustration. There is a psychological grounding in that cultural bonding that prevents anti-social proclivities.

We desperately need to incentivize the preservation of historic housing, historic sites, historic landmarks and historic sites, not only for tourists to gaze upon, but for the peoples of Hawaii to cherish and gather to themselves as symbols of their heritage. This is the foundation upon which the "house" of society is built. Lacking preservation, the results would be catastrophic. New housing is relatively easy to build. Historic Housing can never be re-created once it is gone.

You only have this chance to secure peace and pride for Hawaii by assuring the preservation of these Houses of History. Let us give this small incentive, which is not even a partial percentage of our yearly budget so that we can maintain in partnership with the stewards of our culture these treasured memories of the people. In the memories of our islands we will find the strength of our future.

In wisdom and balance do not pass this CB 52 ( 2017) bill. The consequent damage might be too great to undo. Let us balance the development of the new with the preservation of the past.